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California moves to dismantle nation's largest death row

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who three years ago placed a moratorium on executions, now is moving to dismantle the United States' largest death row by moving all condemned inmates to other prisons within two years. The goal is to turn the section at San Quentin State Prison into a "positive, healing environment." Newsom said Monday it's an outgrowth of his opposition to what he believes is a deeply flawed system, one that "gets my blood boiling." "The prospect of your ending up on death row has more to do with your wealth and race than it does your guilt or innocence," he said. "We talk about justice, we preach justice, but as a nation, we don't practice it on death

row." California, which last carried out an execution in 2006, is one of 28 states that maintain death rows, along with the U.S. government, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. While other states like Illinois have abolished executions, California is merging its condemned inmates into the general prison population with no expectation that any will face execution anytime in the near future.

"We are starting the process of closing death row to repurpose and transform the current housing units into something innovative and anchored in rehabilitation," California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation spokeswoman Vicky Waters told The Associated Press.



"Positive, healing environment"

Barbed wire is seen inside the east block of death row at San Quentin State Prison Tuesday, Aug. 16, 2016, in San Quentin, Calif.

Associated Press
Continued on next page

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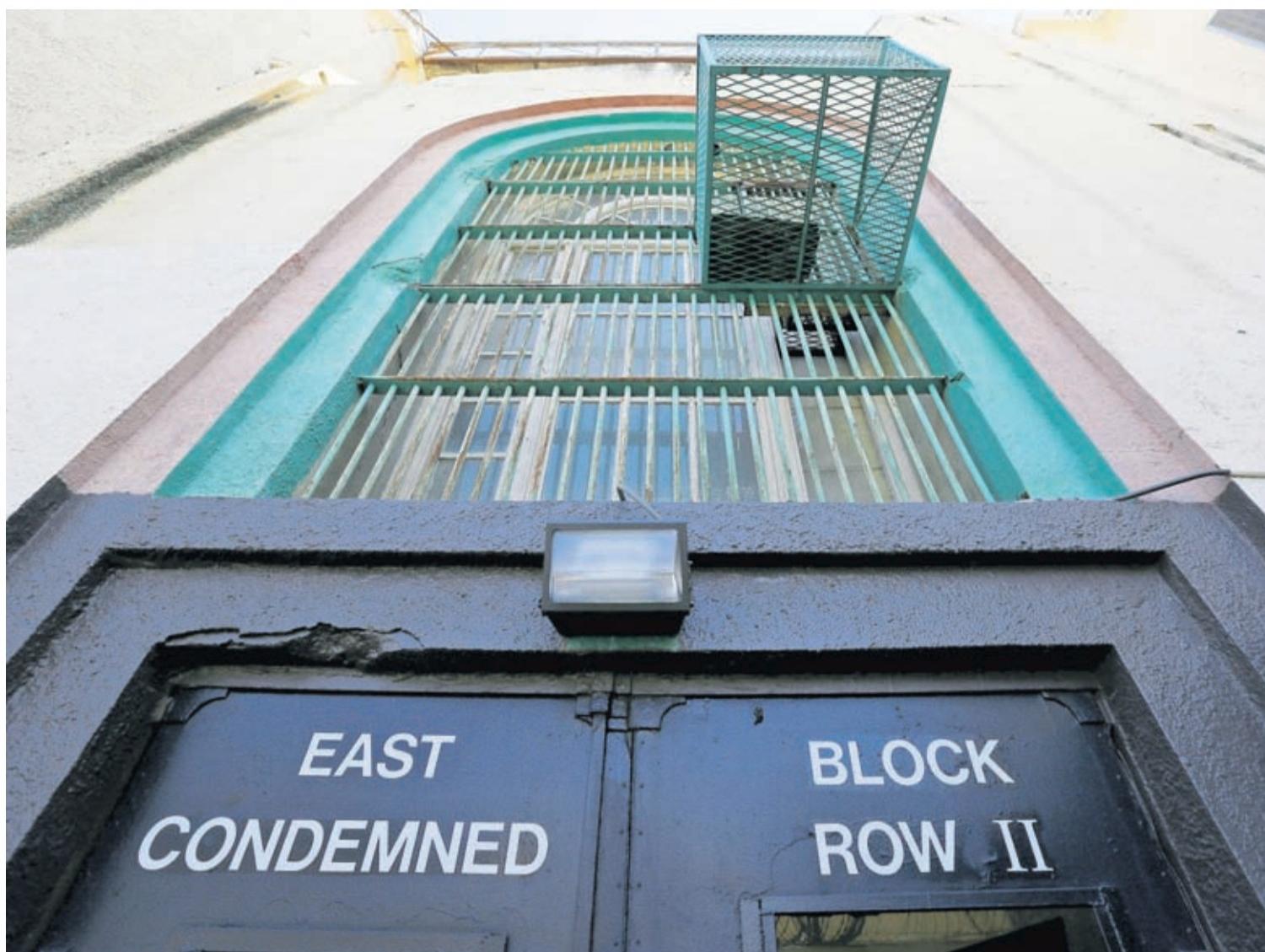
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Shown is the entrance to the east block of death row at San Quentin State Prison, Aug. 16, 2016, in San Quentin, Calif.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

Oregon similarly transferred its much smaller condemned population to other inmate housing two years ago.

Newsom, a Democrat, imposed a moratorium on executions in 2019 and shut down the state's execution chamber at San Quentin, north of San Francisco. Now his administration is turning on its head a 2016 voter-approved initiative intended to expedite executions by capitalizing on one provision that allowed inmates to be moved off death row.

"The underlying motive of the administration is to mainstream as many of these condemned murderers as possible," said Michael Rushford, president of the Criminal Justice Legal Foundation, which

backed the initiative. "Our objective was to speed up the process."

He added he doesn't think victims are happy with the administration's decision.

"They're moving condemned murderers into facilities that are going to make their lives better and offer them more amenities, while the victims still mourn the death of their family member," Rushford said.

Newsom said voters approved the move, though he doubts many understood the provision.

"When they affirmed the death penalty, they also affirmed a responsibility ... to actually move that population on death row out and to get them working," Newsom said.

Corrections officials began a voluntary two-year pilot program in January

2020 that as of Friday had moved 116 of the state's 673 condemned male inmates to one of seven other prisons that have maximum security facilities and are surrounded by lethal electrified fences.

They intend to submit permanent proposed regulations within weeks that would make the transfers mandatory and "allow for the repurposing of all death row housing units," Waters said.

The ballot measure approved six years ago also required condemned inmates to participate in prison jobs, with 70% of the money going for restitution to their victims, and corrections officials said that's their goal with the transfers. By the end of last year, more than \$49,000 in restitution had been collected under

the pilot program. Newsom's proposed budget for the fiscal year starting July 1 seeks \$1.5 million to find new uses for the vacant condemned housing. It notes that death row and its supporting activities are in the same area as facilities used for rehabilitation programs for medium-security San Quentin inmates.

The money would be used to hire a consultant to "develop options for (the) space focused on creating a positive, healing environment to provide increased rehabilitative, educational and health care opportunities."

San Quentin's never-used \$853,000 execution chamber is in a separate area of the prison, and there are no plans to "repurpose" that area, Waters said.

California voters supported the death penalty in 2012 and 2016, though legislative opponents have said they hope to put the issue before voters again in coming years. An advisory panel to Newsom and lawmakers, the Committee on Revision of the Penal Code, in November became the

latest to recommend repealing the death penalty, calling it "beyond repair." Under the state's transfer program, condemned inmates moved to other prisons can be housed in solitary or disciplinary confinement if officials decide they cannot be safely housed with others, although they are supposed to be interspersed with other inmates. Inmates on death row are housed one to a cell, but the transferred inmates can be housed with others if it's deemed safe.

"There have been no safety concerns, and no major disciplinary issues have occurred," Waters said.

When it comes to jobs and other rehabilitation activities, condemned inmates outside death row are treated similarly to inmates serving sentences of life without parole. That includes a variety of jobs such as maintenance and administrative duties, according to prison officials.

The condemned inmates are counted more often and are constantly supervised during activities, officials said. Under current rules, condemned inmates can be transferred unless they are in restricted housing for disciplinary reasons, have pending charges, or have been found guilty of certain disciplinary offenses in the past five years.

But they also are "carefully screened to determine whether they can safely participate in the program," according to the department. That includes things like each inmate's security level, medical, psychiatric and other needs, their behavior, safety concerns and notoriety.

Female condemned inmates are housed at the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla. They can transfer to less restrictive housing within the same prison, and eight of the 21 have done so.

The men can be moved to California Correctional Institution; California Medical Facility; California State Prison, Corcoran; Centinela State Prison; Kern Valley State Prison; Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility; or Salinas Valley State Prison. □



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Georgia DA investigating Trump asks FBI for security help

By KATE BRUMBACK

Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — The prosecutor who's investigating whether Donald Trump and others broke the law by trying to pressure Georgia officials to overturn Joe Biden's presidential election victory is asking the FBI for security help after the former president railed against prosecutors investigating him.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis on Sunday wrote a letter to the FBI office in Atlanta asking for a risk assessment of the county courthouse, where her office is located, and government center. She also asked the FBI to provide protective resources, "to include intelligence and federal agents."

At his rally Saturday night outside Houston, Trump lashed out against the ongoing investigations in New York, Georgia and Washington and called on his supporters to stage mass protests if he is mistreated by them. In her letter, Willis quoted comments Trump made at the rally.

"If these radical, vicious, racist prosecutors do anything wrong or illegal, I hope we are going to have in this country the biggest protest we have ever had



Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis speaks during an interview at her office, Feb. 24, 2021, in Atlanta.

Associated Press

in Washington, D.C., in New York, in Atlanta and elsewhere, because our country and our elections are corrupt," Trump said.

The comments were particularly notable given Trump's role in inciting the Jan. 6, 2021, storming of the Capitol building. Trump also suggested he might pardon those charged for their role in the riot if he runs for president again and wins reelection.

Willis last year opened an

investigation into any potential attempts to improperly influence the 2020 general election in Georgia by Trump and his associates. A special grand jury is set to be seated May 2 to aid in that investigation and Willis asked the FBI to take the steps she requested well in advance of that date. "My staff and I will not be influenced or intimidated by anyone as this investigation moves forward," Willis wrote.

She added that her office has already taken steps to address security concerns "considering the communications we have received from persons unhappy with our commitment to fulfill our duties." She said she's also working with county officials on the need for extra security measures as the investigation progresses. But she said security concerns were "escalated" over the weekend as Trump focused on the prosecutors

looking into his actions, calling them "vicious, horrible people" and "racists." The rhetoric is especially alarming, Willis wrote, in light of Trump's suggestion that if he returns to the White House, he could give pardons to people who stormed the U.S. Capitol last year in an effort to block the certification of Biden's win.

"We must work together to keep the public safe and ensure that we do not have a tragedy in Atlanta similar to what happened at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021," Willis wrote in the letter to the FBI. Jenna Sellitto, a spokesperson for the FBI in Atlanta, confirmed receipt of the letter but declined to comment further.

In his pushback against the various investigations centered on him, Trump has taken particular aim at New York Attorney General Letitia James, who recently said her office has uncovered evidence that Trump's company used "fraudulent or misleading" valuations of his properties to secure loans and tax benefits. That includes playing a video at a previous rally that features footage of her vowing to take on Trump as she ran for election. □

HUD prioritizes environment, economic equity in bloc grants

By ASHRAF KHALIL

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Department of Housing and Urban Development has laid out new guidelines for the disbursal of \$2 billion in disaster-relief block grants, with an emphasis on climate-change mitigation and equity for underserved communities.

The new guidelines, published Monday in the Federal Register, spell out specific priorities for the use of the funds by state and local agencies that receive the Community Development Block Grants.

The funds were allocated last year to aid in relief efforts for disasters that took place in 2020 in 10 states and territories. These include: wildfires in California, a dam collapse in Michigan,

Hurricane Zeta in Mississippi, and earthquakes and Tropical Storm Isaias in Puerto Rico.

These block grants traditionally come with a great deal of flexibility for local authorities and recipient agencies to decide where best to target the funds depending on the nature of the disaster. For example, wildfires tend to largely destroy buildings and residences, while storms and hurricanes often do the most damage to infrastructure like bridges, sewers and electrical grids.

Most of that flexibility will remain, but HUD is now directing recipient agencies to prioritize long-term environmental resilience and serving traditionally marginalized populations.

The guidelines have been largely expected, and HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge spoke of these specific priorities when they were first announced in November 2021.

Fudge said at the time that the disbursal of the funds would reflect President Joe Biden's emphasis on "addressing climate justice in hard-hit communities," and "building long-term and inclusive resilience to the impacts of climate change, particularly for underserved and marginalized communities."

HUD spokesman Michael Burns said the agency is defining underserved communities as areas that "were economically distressed before the disaster" and populations that



Mark Andollina, left, and Shane Holder, remove part of a roof damaged by Hurricane Zeta from the road at the Cajun Tide Beach Resort in Grand Isle, La., Oct. 30, 2020.

Associated Press

"have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life."

All new construction fund-

ed by the grants will need to be built to green standards that emphasize energy efficiency and resilience against similar disasters down the line. □

Mandate to vaccinate New Orleans schoolchildren kicking in

By REBECCA SANTANA

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — As school systems across the U.S. struggle to keep classrooms open amid the pandemic, New Orleans is set to become the nation's first major district to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations for children 5 and up, though state regulations will allow parents to opt out easily.

Ahead of Tuesday's deadline, many schools in the city have been holding vaccination events, including one at KIPP Believe school.

One by one, dozens of children presented their signed permission slips, pushed up the sleeves of their pale yellow school uniform shirts and — often wincing, but rarely with tears — received a shot. Then they got candy.

Some said they had loved ones who had gotten the coronavirus and wanted to do what they could to protect their families. Others said their parents decided. Eight-year-old Nyla Carey had talked to her mother. "She said that the COVID shot was to protect you. And so now I want to be brave," the third-grader said before going back to class.

Schools Superintendent Henderson Lewis said the requirement, announced in December in the district of nearly 46,000 students,



A young boy walks down a hallway to get tested for COVID-19 at L.B. Landry High School in the Algiers neighborhood of New Orleans, on Jan. 3, 2022.

Associated Press

won't lead to youngsters being kicked out of school come Tuesday.

Waivers for those opposed to vaccination are easy to obtain under state regulations, and schools will work with students who aren't inoculated, he said. But eventually everyone will have to be vaccinated or have a waiver.

New Orleans is a Democratic enclave in a red state, and the city and the district are outliers in the South, where many parents and elected officials have balked at measures to control the coronavirus.

In fact, Louisiana Health Department guidelines say

parents can obtain waivers from any immunization simply by citing medical, religious or philosophical objections.

Tulane University epidemiologist Susan Hassig said that even with the waiver option, the mandate is a good way to get students vaccinated. She said parents who were a little unsure or hadn't gotten around to it will have a stronger motivation to get their kids' shots. The New Orleans public school system consists entirely of charter schools, which are taxpayer-supported but independently operated. It has a mask mandate in place, and

thousands of students are tested weekly. There's been little of the public controversy seen in other districts, where parents have berated school boards.

Henderson said the mandate was a bottom-up decision, with charter school operators across the district submitting letters of support, as opposed to district officials imposing the policy on their own.

About one-quarter of the district's schools were closed to in-person learning in mid-January as the omicron wave hit staff members and students, according to Henderson.

Christine Pitts of the Center

on Reinventing Public Education suggested that the charter schools' habit of operating independently might have played a role in their support for the vaccine requirement.

The measure is also in step with others taken by the city at large to curb the virus, including a recently reinstated mask mandate and vaccination requirements for everyone 5 and older to enter certain places, such as restaurants.

A few other school districts around the country have taken similar measures. Students in Washington, D.C., will be required to be vaccinated by March 1. The Los Angeles school system delayed a requirement that students 12 and up be vaccinated after it became clear that thousands of unvaccinated students who didn't meet the requirement would have to do online learning.

But many states have gone the other direction, in some cases banning schools from mandating the vaccine. About 55% of all 5- to 17-year-olds in New Orleans have had at least one dose of the vaccine, according to city figures. Statewide the number is about 26%. That compares with 66% of 12- to 17-year-olds and 30% of 5- to 11-year-olds nationally, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. □

Family wants no contact with woman facing terrorism charge



This undated photo provided by the Alexandria, Va., Sheriff's Office in January 2022 shows Allison Fluke-Ekren.

Associated Press

By MATTHEW BARAKAT
ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP)

— The family of a Kansas woman charged with joining the Islamic State group and leading an all-female battalion says they want nothing to do with her, a prosecutor said Monday. Allison Ekren, 42, made an initial appearance on Monday afternoon in U.S. District Court in Alexandria. The hearing lasted only minutes; she was ordered to remain in jail pending a detention hearing set for Thursday afternoon, and an attorney was appointed to represent her.

At the end of the hearing, though, First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh told

the judge that he had been in contact with Ekren's parents and her adult children, and all had said they wanted no contact with her.

The magistrate judge, Ivan Davis, said he had little ability to keep her from reaching out to her family from jail, but told Ekren he would take it into account at Thursday's hearing if she contacted her family against their wishes.

Ekren, speaking in a soft-spoken voice and wearing an inmate jumpsuit and headscarf, said she understood the restriction. She also told the judge, in response to his question,

that she preferred to be addressed as Ekren. The Justice Department used her full name, Allison Fluke-Ekren, when it announced charges against her Saturday.

Prosecutors say Ekren wanted to recruit operatives to attack a college campus in the U.S. and discussed the idea of attacking a shopping mall. She told one witness that "she considered any attack that did not kill a large number of individuals to be a waste of resources," according to an FBI affidavit.

The affidavit also alleges Ekren became leader of

an Islamic State unit called "Khatiba Nusaybah" in the Syrian city of Raqqa in late 2016. The all-female unit was trained in the use of AK-47 rifles, grenades and suicide belts.

According to court papers, Ekren moved to Egypt in 2008 and traveled frequently between Egypt and the U.S. over the next three years. She has not been in the U.S. since 2011. Prosecutors believe she moved to Syria around 2012.

Ekren's newly appointed attorney, Joseph King, declined comment after Monday's hearing. □

EU auditor: Fossil fuels get more tax breaks than renewables

By SAMUEL PETREQUIN

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union nations often still tax and subsidize their energy sources in contradiction with their committed climate goals, and a majority spend more supporting fossil fuels than renewables.

After reviewing carbon pricing measures, energy taxation levels and energy subsidies in the 27-country region, the EU's external auditor warned Monday that the amount that energy sources are taxed does not mirror their greenhouse gas emissions.

The European Court of Auditors found that more polluting energy sources may get a tax advantage compared with others with better carbon efficiency. Coal, for instance, is on average taxed less than natural gas which is more carbon efficient and some fossil fuels are taxed less than electricity, which could be produced by low-carbon sources. Auditors said their review aims to contribute to the debate around the European Commission proposal to change the bloc's energy tax directive, which



A woman walks in the fog past EU flags in front of EU headquarters in Brussels, Tuesday, Jan. 25, 2022.

sets minimum tax levels. They noted that while a majority of EU countries impose high taxes on fuels, several others keep taxes close to the minimum. "Low carbon prices and low energy taxes on fossil fuels increase the relative cost of greener technologies and delay the energy transition," they said. Within the EU, energy taxes

make up 78% of total environmental taxes worth 330 billion euros (\$370 billion) per year.

Fossil fuel subsidies in the EU have remained largely constant over the past 10 years around 55 billion to 58 billion euros (about \$62 billion to \$65 billion) per year which auditors say has hindered the transition toward a greener economy.

Associated Press

Member countries provided about two-thirds of the aid through tax exemptions or reductions.

While renewable energy subsidies are higher across the bloc, 15 EU countries spend more supporting fossil fuels than renewables. The European Commission and some member countries have committed to phase out fossil fuel subsi-

dies by 2025, but the auditors said it "will be a challenging social and economic transition."

The European Court of Auditors, however, said renewable energy subsidies almost quadrupled between 2008 and 2019 and that the use of renewables to produce electricity went up in all member countries over the last decade.

As part of the "European Green Deal," the EU has committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. Brussels also is aiming to become "climate neutral" by midcentury. Scientists say this goal needs to be achieved to keep average global temperatures from rising above 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 F) by 2100. The EU's executive branch has proposed creating a carbon market for buildings and vehicles, which would not be tied to the current EU emission trading system that it wants to extend to ships. The EU also is considering a carbon tax on imports from countries that don't have the same environmental restrictions. □

Europe storms: Ships collide off Dutch coast; crew evacuated

By MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — Rescue helicopters evacuated all 18 crew members from a ship that was left drifting rudderless in a wind turbine park off the Dutch North Sea coast Monday after it collided with another ship and began taking on water during a powerful storm, emergency services said.

The collision happened as Storm Corrie lashed parts of the northern Europe. It came after Storm Malik killed at least four people over the weekend, destroying houses, unleashing flooding and leaving thousands of households without electricity.

A freighter called the Julietta D collided with another boat about 20 miles (32 kilometers) west of the port of Ijmuiden, said Edward Zwitser, a spokesman for

the Royal Dutch Lifeboat Company.

The other boat, the Pechora Star, also was damaged, but was able to continue its voyage.

The Dutch coast guard said that all crew members were rescued. It didn't immediately provide more

details of the rescue on the high seas amid powerful winds. Dutch television showed the rescued crew arriving in a helicopter at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport.

Three helicopters, including one from Belgium, were involved in the rescue opera-

tion.

The Juliette D suffered damage "that poses direct danger for the 18 crew on board," spokesman Edward Zwitser told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Both ships had been anchored off the coast, but the Julietta D's anchor "did not hold," the coast guard said.

Hours later, with winds easing in the Netherlands, the Julietta D was still drifting and the coast guard said efforts were underway to attach a line to a tugboat so that the vessel could be towed to safety.

Thousands of homes in the Nordic region remained without power Monday and there were reports of flooding in North Sea and Baltic Sea harbors in the region.

The western Netherlands were hard hit Monday



A storm sweeping over the Netherlands sent a tree crashing down on the roof and windshield of a car in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Monday, Jan. 31, 2022.

Associated Press

morning with powerful gusts uprooting trees and causing traffic problems.

Storm Corrie also hit Scotland late Sunday, hot on the heels of Storm Malik, which left thousands in Scotland and northern England without power as it blew down trees, damaged power lines and ripped roofs off homes.

A nine-year-old boy in the English county of Staffordshire and a 60-year-old woman in the Scottish city of Aberdeen died after trees were torn down on Saturday.

Also over the weekend, Danish media reported that a 78-year-old woman died from severe injuries after falling in strong winds. In neighboring Germany, local media reported that a man was killed on Saturday after being hit by a billboard that was loosened by the storm. □

U.S.-allied Syria force says it foiled major IS comeback plot

By ZEINA KARAM
Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — A U.S.-backed Kurdish-led force said Monday that a prison overrun by the Islamic State group in northeastern Syria was now fully under its control, thwarting a dangerous plot by the extremists to launch further, multiple attacks across the volatile region.

It also appealed for the international community's help in taking responsibility for the tens of thousands of IS fighters and their families in detention centers and camps under its control.

The Syrian Democratic Forces said more than 120 of their fighters and prison workers died in the 10-day standoff at the Gweiran prison, also known as al-Sinaa prison, which houses at least 3,000 Islamic State group detainees. Some 374 IS militants, including the initial attackers, were also killed, it added.

The Jan. 20 assault on one of the largest detention facilities in Syria has turned the city of Hassakeh into a conflict zone and forced thousands of residents to



U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces soldiers search for Islamic State militants in Hassakeh, Syria, Saturday, Jan. 29, 2022.

flee. The fighting drew in the U.S.-led coalition, which carried out airstrikes and deployed American personnel in Bradley Fighting Vehicles to the scene. It was the biggest military operation by the extremist group since the fall of its self-declared caliphate in 2019 and came as the militants staged deadly attacks in both Syria and Iraq that stoked fears that IS may be staging a comeback. At a

press conference Monday, SDF commander Nowruz Ahmad said the IS prison attack aimed at liberating a number of terrorist detainees, but also was part of a broader plot that IS had been preparing for a long time.

According to seized documents and confessions of some of the attackers, the extremist group had planned attacks on other neighborhoods in Has-

sakeh, the town of Shaddada and areas of Deir el-Zour in eastern Syria. Also planned were simultaneous attacks on the al-Hol camp, which houses thousands of families of IS members.

"They (IS) wanted to launch a massive attack on the region, and once again to spread their terror and impose darkness on the people of the region and revive the terrorist organization

once again," Ahmad said. She also accused neighboring Turkey, an arch-enemy of the Kurds, of facilitating and assisting in the organization of the prison attack but did not provide evidence.

Ahmad said the attack demonstrated the need for radical solutions to the ongoing presence of tens of thousands of IS detainees and their families in northeastern Syria, as well as expediting the trial and prosecution of IS terrorists.

In Washington, State Department spokesperson Ned Price commended the SDF for their effective response to the prison attack.

IS's "desperate and violent tactics are a grave reminder to the world that the terrorist group remains a threat that can and must be defeated," he said in a statement.

"Due to the effective response of the SDF, in partnership with U.S. and Coalition forces, senior ISIS leaders were captured or killed during the attempt to free detained ISIS members from detention" he added. □

Israel calls on Amnesty not to release apartheid report

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel on Monday called on Amnesty International not to publish an upcoming report accusing it of apartheid, saying the conclusions of the London-based international human rights group are "false, biased and antisemitic."

Amnesty is expected to join the New York-based Human Rights Watch and the Israeli rights group B'Tselem in accusing Israel of the international crime of apartheid based on its nearly 55-year military occupation of lands the Palestinians want for a future state and because of its treatment of its own Arab minority.

Israel dismissed the other reports as biased, but is adopting a much more adversarial stance this time around. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has said Israel

expects intensified efforts this year to brand it as an apartheid state in international bodies and hopes to head them off.

In a statement issued Monday, he said Amnesty "is just another radical organization which echoes propaganda, without seriously checking the facts," and that it "echoes the same lies shared by terrorist organizations."

"Israel isn't perfect, but we are a democracy committed to international law, open to criticism, with a free press and a strong and independent judicial system," Lapid said.

Amnesty did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Amnesty's report "denies the state of Israel's right to exist as the

nation state of the Jewish people."

"Its extremist language and distortion of historical context were designed to demonize Israel and pour fuel onto the fire of antisemitism," it added.

Neither Human Rights Watch nor B'Tselem compared Israel to South Africa, where an apartheid system based on white supremacy and racial segregation was in place from 1948 until the early 1990s. Instead, they evaluate Israel's policies based on international conventions like the Rome Statute, which defines apartheid as "an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group."

They argue that Israel's various policies in the territories under its control are



Palestinians use a ladder to climb over the separation barrier with Israel on their way to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, in Al-Ram, north of Jerusalem, July 11, 2014.

Associated Press

aimed at preserving a Jewish majority in as much of the land as possible by systematically denying basic rights to Palestinians. Israel says its policies are aimed at ensuring the survival and security of the world's only Jewish state. The International Criminal Court is already investigating potential war crimes committed by Israel and Palestinian militants in the occupied

territories. After last year's Gaza war, the U.N. Human Rights Council set up a permanent commission of inquiry to investigate abuses in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, including "systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity." Israel has accused both the ICC and the U.N. rights body of being biased against it. □

Some asylum aspirants pin hopes on Trump-era policy

By MARIA VERZA and ELLIOT SPAGAT

Associated Press

REYNOSA, Mexico (AP) — A revived Trump-era policy to make asylum-seekers wait in Mexico for hearings in U.S. court is reviled by immigration advocates and repudiated by the Biden administration, which acted under a judge's order. Asylum hopeful Alexander Sánchez of Venezuela has a more favorable view.

"There is no other way to cross legally and, for that reason, I think it's good," he said at a migrant shelter in Reynosa, a Mexican border city where he has been living for nine months with his wife and their 5-year-old daughter.

Sánchez's optimism reflects the desperation of migrants who have seen asylum shut down under U.S. restrictions that deny humanitarian protections on grounds of preventing spread of the coronavirus, another Trump-era policy that the Biden administration supports.

The U.S. returned its first asylum-seekers from Brownsville, Texas, starting Jan. 25, under its "Migrant Protection Protocols" policy. It was barely noticed — the latest step in a slow-moving rollout across the border to make asylum hearings available to migrants who wait in Mexico.

So far, "MPP 2.0" pales compared to pandemic-related restrictions on seeking asylum at the border. Only 381 migrants had been returned to Mexico to wait for hearings from Dec. 6, when it resumed in El Paso, Texas, through Wednesday, according to the U.N. migration agency.

U.S. authorities expelled migrants more than 1.5 million times without an opportunity to claim asylum since March 2020 under the pandemic restrictions known as Title 42 authority, named for a 1944 public health law. In December alone, they were expelled nearly 80,000 times.

Walter Alexis Beltrán said staying at a camp of some 2,000 migrants in Reynosa's central plaza with his wife



Migrants mainly from Honduras and Nicaragua seeking asylum sit in line after turning themselves in upon crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, in La Joya, Texas, May 17, 2021.

Associated Press

and 4-year-old daughter was better than living at home in El Salvador. The optometrist charges 25 cents to charge migrants' phones with a battery he purchased with his last savings.

Beltrán has been living at the camp for four months, disappointed that U.S. authorities sent him back to Mexico under Title 42 authority without a chance to make his case for asylum. He said he paid a smuggler \$4,500 to reach the U.S. from Mexico.

"MPP has advantages and disadvantages," Beltrán said amid a labyrinth of tents. "The disadvantage is that it's dangerous here." Their hopes may be misplaced. Less than 1% of claims were granted among more than 70,000 people in MPP from its launch in January 2019 to when President Joe Biden suspended it on his first day in office a year ago, according to Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. About half were pending and the rest denied or dismissed.

In August, U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, a Trump appointee in Amarillo, Texas, ordered that the policy be reinstated "in good faith," subject to Mexico's acceptance, triggering months of intense bilateral talks. Biden has been highly critical of the policy, largely because it exposes migrants to extreme violence while waiting in Mexico.

Despite the appearance of asylum being virtually banned, U.S. authorities process about six of every 10 people who cross illegally under immigration laws, which include the right to seek asylum. Nearly all of them — about 100,000 in December alone — are released or detained in the U.S. while judges consider their cases. The administration has not said why so many can seek asylum while remaining in the U.S. — and so many can't.

More clarity about U.S. policies is needed, said Abraham Barberi, founder of the Dulce Refugio de Matamoros migrant shelter east of Reynosa, who is in regular contact with U.S. authori-

ties.

"Their goal is fewer people coming and discouraging people but they have to make clear who can come and who can't," Barberi said. "People need clear direction."

Talks to resume MPP began every other week after the judge's order in August and became more frequent as negotiators tackled a growing number of sticking points and logistics and as small migrant caravans moved through southern Mexico.

From the start, Mexico worried about returning people with court dates in the U.S. to the state of Tamaulipas, considered the border's most dangerous area. It lies across from Texas' Rio Grande Valley, the busiest corridor for illegal crossings. The Biden administration started "MPP 2.0" in El Paso with plans to process 30 to 50 people a day there,

according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. They fell far short, even after extending the policy to San Diego in

early January.

Of 256 asylum-seekers returned from El Paso as of Jan. 12, Nicaraguans accounted for about three of every five with Venezuelans and Cubans making up most of the rest, according to Human Rights First, an advocacy group.

The Biden administration has declined to say how many asylum-seekers have been returned to Mexico with court dates in the U.S. since the policy resumed and has not provided a breakdown by nationality. The Homeland Security Department said in response to questions that migrants can't choose to participate in MPP and that the policy is applied to those who cannot be expelled under pandemic restrictions. It hasn't said who those people are, but Mexico only accepts people from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador under the U.S. public health order. Others from Western hemisphere countries are released with orders to appear in court or detained in the U.S. until they can be flown home, making them prime candidates for MPP.

Migrants keep arriving at the Reynosa camp. Ruth Rubio, Marvin López and their 6-year-old daughter fled Honduras after two of Rubio's siblings were killed in gang violence. Without guidance from the U.S. government, they are waiting indefinitely to find out if there's a way to apply for asylum without crossing the border illegally. Rubio's 20-year-old daughter, who was wounded in Honduras, was allowed to wait in the U.S. pending an asylum decision.

They are interested in the reinstated policy to wait in Mexico for court hearings in the U.S. It is expected to expand soon to the Texas border cities of Laredo and Eagle Pass.

"If it's the only way (to get asylum in the U.S.), it's welcome," said Juan Antonio Sierra of the Pastoral for Human Mobility in Matamoros, a migrant aid group affiliated with the Catholic Church. □

More than \$150,000 in prizes The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba launched its amazing campaign: Mega Win Luxury Vacations!



PALM BEACH — The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba just launched its amazing campaign: Mega Win Luxury Vacations! This campaign starts on February 1st till April 30th, 2022, where they will raffle dream vacations to the newest hotels in the Caribbean: The Ritz-Carlton, Turks and Caicos and The St. Regis Bermuda Resort. They will also raffle dream vacations to The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba and more prizes amongst their visitors.

All members of The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba can participate in this campaign starting February 1st till April 30th. There will be 3 drawing dates: February 26th, March 26th and April 30th. A total of 10 finalists will be selected on each drawing date and will qualify through the raffle tickets in the raffle box and through the MVP (Most Valuable Player) promotion. To participate is very easy: you need to be a member of The Casino VIP Club. For every 80 points you accumulate on slot play and every \$40 dollars in Theoretical Win on table play you will receive one ticket. In addition you have the option to receive one free raffle ticket to par-



ticipate by visiting one of our Restaurants at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba.

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- 3 x vacations for two persons to The St. Regis Bermuda Resort
- 3 x vacations for two persons to The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba
- 21 x slot credit prizes for a total of \$52,500

for both slot machines and table games and receive cash redemption from slot machine points, while accumulated table comps can be redeemed towards enjoying the hotel's celebrated amenities, including complimentary rooms nights, dining, and spa.

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For more information about the Mega Win Luxury Vacations Campaign, the Elevate Tier Program and other promotions, visit us at The Casino at The Ritz-Carlton, Aruba VIP Desk or call us at 527-2276/ 527-2277 and we will be delighted to assist you.□

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The Prime Minister of Aruba congratulates Honduras for its first female president Xiomara Castro

ORANJESTAD - On Thursday, January 27, 2022, the Prime Minister of Aruba attended the inauguration of the Honduran president Mrs. Xiomara Castro.

President Castro is the first female President of Honduras, making this occasion extra special. The Prime Minister of Aruba, Aruba's first female Prime Minister, attended the inauguration ceremony representing the Dutch Kingdom. During an interview with Honduran TV channel 11, the Prime Minister explained that she did not hesitate to be part of this historic event for Honduras when she received the invitation to represent

the Dutch Kingdom. Both leaders have known each other for a while now. According to the Prime Minister, Aruba needs to expand its ties with Honduras. "We are currently in the recovery phase of Covid, and it is important to seek investors to rebuild our island. What Covid has taught us is the importance of working together and having alliances".

Support of female leaders

The Prime Minister mentioned that it is more common to have male leaders. That is why it is imperative to support each other. "Once companies and organizations have female lead-

ers, the women will bring other things to the table, like comprehension, empathy, and feelings. This is very important in the recovery from the Global Covid crisis. That is why I support the Honduran President", the Prime Minister stated.

The Prime Minister expressed gratitude for the opportunity, hospitality, and warm welcome in Honduras. The Prime Minister on behalf of the Government of Aruba and the community of Aruba congratulates the people of Honduras with their new President Xiomara Castro. She hopes that the Hondurans support their new president in her endeavors.□



ORANJESTAD - Recently, the Minister of Justice, Rococo Tjon, officially opened the Webinar: Human trafficking and smuggling organized by the Coordination Center Human Trafficking.

The webinar Human Smuggling "CMMA" was held at the (National Central Bureau for Counterterrorism,

Security, and INTERPOL). In connection with the phenomena of Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling, the CMMA held an intensive campaign called "open your eyes" to create awareness about this subject.

The authorities have invested more in securing the coastal border through the active "border agree-

CMMA Webinar: Human trafficking and smuggling

ment", meaning that all relevant departments are working jointly at the borders. One of the investments includes "Interpol at the borders", and more will be invested in workshops and seminars to create awareness. Over 130 participants from all parts of the Dutch Kingdom, like the Netherlands, St. Maarten, and Bonaire, attended this webinar.

According to the CMMA coordinator, Mrs. Jeanette Richardson, they opted for the virtual seminar because of the pandemic. With this webinar, the CMMA will

continue to share information with those who work in law enforcement, including judges and prosecutors.

The current trajectory is long from the first notification of human trafficking and smuggling until it reaches the courthouse. Human trafficking is very complicated and requires adequate information. To help share this information with the participants,

the organizers invited two Dutch experts with over 20 years of experience in the human trafficking and human smuggling field and the public prosecutor. They

shared their expertise on how to put their cases together.

The focus of the webinar was on the investigation part, for example, what one has to take into account to have a solid case when presenting this in court. There will be more speakers who will share their knowledge with the participants.

The Minister expressed gratitude for the great initiative of the CMMA. This type of seminar is essential for the many Government departments and partners within the Dutch Kingdom.□

European vaccination certification valid for 9 months

ORANJESTAD - Starting February 1, 2022, the rules will change regarding the valid term of the European Vaccination Certificate (Digital Corona Certificate or 'DCC').

The reason for this change is the effectiveness of the vaccine over time. As of February 1, 2022, the valid term for the European Vaccine Certificate will be nine

months after taking the last vaccine of the basic series of vaccines, meaning the first and second Pfizer vaccine or one Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Individuals who only received the first two Pfizer vaccines or one Johnson & Johnson vaccine and did not receive their booster vaccine must be aware that many European countries will not accept the European Vac-

cination Certificate with the basic vaccine series older than nine months. The validity of the European Vaccination Certificate cannot affect only the entrance into European countries but also the use of services in the hospitality area or cultural events. The validity period will be extended to nine months after receiving the booster vaccine.

The DVG urges everyone over 18 years to get their booster vaccine as soon as possible, at least three months after receiving the second Pfizer vaccine or the first Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The booster vaccine provides better protection against the Omicron variant. It also prevents complications and even hospitalization since the booster vaccine

increases the number of antibodies in the person's defense system. Those recently infected with Covid19 should wait at least three months after testing positive for their booster vaccine. The DVG also urges travelers to verify the destination's vaccine and testing rules as each country has its Covid19 policies for travelers. □



ORANJESTAD- Recently, 12 professionals of different Government departments have completed the training "Interrogation of Minors".

It is an essential achievement for professionals who are now better equipped

to interrogate and investigate sexual abuse cases. The theoretical part took place in December while the practical part of the training recently ended. Now the entire Youth and Vice Police (JZP) is certified. In addition to the JZP detectives, some psycholo-

All youth and vice police detectives certified to interrogate

gists of the Orthopedagogical Centrum, Guardianship Council (Directie Voogdijraad), and Correction Institute Aruba (KIA) are now certified.

According to Minister of Justice Rocco Tjon, in sexual abuse cases, a proper investigation is essential.

This matter has also been voiced on multiple occasions by the Bar Association. They told Parliament that sometimes, in their plea, the investigation can be discredited if improperly done. By making a police investigation airtight, it can have an added value to

the case. Several steps are taken to ensure that the cases are solid. The Public Prosecutor's Office will soon announce new instructions for specifically investigating sexual abuse cases. The Minister was happy to see two prosecutors from the Prosecutor's office issue these certificates.

Kinterview is a renowned organization with plenty of years of experience on this matter. It provides this training and certifies Police Departments in the Netherlands. The participants that completed the course were informed that the much-needed equipment

for the "Studio Interrogation Room" was bought. It enables certified professionals to conduct interrogations according to the international rules and standards for solid investigations. Now there are enough professionals that can conduct interrogations on such a high level.

The Minister thanked Mrs. Daphny Tecklenborg, who is leading the "Family Justice Center", for her efforts in organizing this training. The objective of this training is to continue to provide more professionals with valuable training. □

Foundation "Ban uni man pa cria nos muchanan" needs a helping hand Feeding the needy children of Aruba every school day

ORANJESTAD — "Ban uni man pa cria nos muchanan" is a foundation whose goal it is to provide the needy children of Aruba with a breakfast every school day. A breakfast which consists of a sandwich and a drink (juice or milk). It is an independent foundation, receiving no subsidy whatsoever from the government.

The program started at the beginning of the 2001/2002 school year as a community service project of the Facility Department of the Dr. Horacio E. Oduber Hospital, with 138 children. At the closing of the school year 320 children were enrolled and this kept growing steadily each year. The

2019 school year started with 650 children but as the schools reopened after the peak of the pandemic, the number of children grew to a staggering 794 children at the closing of the 2019-2020 school year! These children are from 57 elementary schools all over the island. This number also includes about 70 children of the Traimerdia project, which is an after school program. For over 20 years the foundation has been providing breakfast to children of elementary schools but they are aiming on some day also be able to provide kindergartens and high schools, seeing that there are many children in need.

The breakfast program is a sponsorship program; although the sponsors are encouraged to donate Fls 25.00 per month, the actual cost per child has doubled. Leaning towards Fls. 50.00 per month. Simple arithmetic shows that the current 450 sponsors are not enough. At Fls 50.00 per month it takes 800 sponsors to keep the program running – or a combination of sponsors and donations.

Due to the effect of the pandemic and the increase in consumption prices the foundation is expecting a big deficit for the new school year of 2021-2022. If they don't manage to get sufficient funds they will have to reduce the amount of children to

600, meaning that at least 200 children won't be able to receive a breakfast this year and they would have to make the difficult decision in choosing who will stay on the list and who to remove. The foundation will keep working hard and do their utmost on getting these funds but they need the help of the community.

If you feel inspired by this article, do not just turn the page but act upon it. You can help and support this wonderful foundation by making a donation to their bank account at the following banks: CMB 22559501, RBC 43.65.011 and at the Aruba Bank 2516290190.

For more information, or to



receive a transcript of the Chamber of Commerce, the By-Laws or the latest Financial Report (2020-2021) of the foundation, please contact Mrs. Rachelle Roos at +297-527-4000 or Mrs. Felicia Halman at +297-527-4750 or Mr. John Fun (President) at +297-527-4711 or at +297-699-4330.

Your support will help the children of this program at least have a breakfast every day. □

How your parents' debt could outlive them

By LIZ WESTON of NerdWallet

Many people believe one of two common myths when a parent dies in debt, says Chicago estate planning attorney Michael Whitty. The first myth is that an adult child will become liable for their parents' debt. The second myth is that they can't.

Adult children typically don't have to pay their parents' bills, but there are exceptions. And even when a child doesn't have to pay directly, debt could reduce what they inherit.

Debt doesn't simply disappear when someone dies, Whitty explains. Creditors can file claims against the estate, and those claims usually have to be paid before anything is distributed to heirs. Creditors also are allowed to contact relatives about the dead person's debts, even if those family members have no legal obligation to pay.

If you're concerned that your parents' debt might outlive them, consider talking to an estate planning attorney for personalized legal advice. Here are some issues to explore.

WHEN YOU CAN AND CAN'T BE HELD PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE

Generally, family members don't have to use their own money to pay a dead relative's debts unless they:

- Co-signed a loan, were a joint account holder or otherwise agreed to be held responsible for the debt.

- Are the surviving spouse and live in a community property state or a state that requires surviving spouses to pay debts such as medical bills.

- Were legally responsible for settling the estate and didn't follow state law.

For example, if you're the executor of your parent's estate and distribute money to yourself or other heirs before paying off creditors, the creditors could sue you to get the money back.

SHOULD YOU FEAR 'FILIAL RESPONSIBILITY' LAWS?

More than half of the states still have "filial responsibil-



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

Associated Press

ity" laws on the books that technically could require adult children to pay their impoverished parents' bills, says estate and elder law attorney Letha McDowell of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

These laws are holdovers from a time when debtors prisons existed, says McDowell, who is president of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys. Their use has faded since the 1965 creation of Medicare — the health coverage program for people 65 and over — and Medicaid, the health coverage program

for the poor. Filial responsibility statutes are rarely enforced, although in 2012, a nursing home chain used Pennsylvania's law to successfully sue a son for his mother's \$93,000 bill. Some legal experts have predicted more such lawsuits as long-term care costs rise, but so far that hasn't materialized, McDowell says.

HOW CREDITORS GET PAID — INCLUDING MEDICAID

If someone dies with more debt than assets, their estate is considered insolvent and state law typically determines the order in which

one's nursing home expenses, for example, the state can file a claim against the estate or a lien against the person's home, McDowell says. Medicaid eligibility and recovery rules can be complex and vary by state, which is why it can help to consult an elder law attorney if a parent may need Medicaid to cover nursing home bills, McDowell says. She urges planning appropriately "to make sure that your family doesn't wind up without a house."

The last debts to be paid include unsecured debt, such as credit card bills or personal loans. If there's not enough money to pay those debts, the creditors get a share of whatever is left. Only after creditors are paid in full can any remaining assets be distributed to heirs.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN COLLECTORS CALL

Often, creditors won't even file a claim against an insolvent estate if there's little hope they'll collect, Whitty says. But that doesn't mean they won't ask surviving family members to pay.

Legally, debt collection agencies are allowed to contact a surviving spouse or executor to request payment, and to contact relatives to ask how to reach a spouse or executor. However, collection agencies aren't allowed to say that the debt is legally owed by a survivor if it isn't, Whitty says.

"One of the reforms that has been noticeable over the time I've been practicing is that collection agencies now must affirmatively state that the surviving family members are not obligated on the debt," he says.

Of course, collection agencies aren't known for always following the law. If you're contacted by an unethical or abusive collector, consider filing a complaint with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. You can do that, and learn more about your rights under the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, at the CFPB website. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 40 Make

- 1 Designer blank
Wang 41 Do some
5 Iron refining
output 42 Doesn't
10 Daisy own
variety 43 Midmonth
12 Pigeon's day

**Yesterday's answer****DOWN**

- 13 Showy orange blooms 1 Went to the polls
15 Yale rooter 2 Banished
16 Toddy base 3 Ruling group
17 Sinking signal 4 Pro vote
18 Humiliate 5 Slender
20 Mete (out) 6 — Aviv
21 River part 7 Prolific inventor
22 Ceases 8 Ancient
23 Hannah of "Splash" 9 Neatnik's no-nos
25 Safekeeping 10 11 12
28 Like fresh brownies 13 14
31 Manual reader 15 16 17
32 Texas capital 18 19 20
34 Relaxing resort 21 22
35 Make a choice 23 24
36 Top card 25 26 27 28 29 30
37 Striped sea predators 31 32 33
38 39
40 41
42 43

A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three Ls, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-1**CRYPTOQUOTE**

V R O A M V E Y N B R O O G B V R O

M Y R G K O G O N O B : V R O I . B

O R V Y C M X V K M L Q A M V

B O T T B . — C O K Q S R I K V D O K E
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: TRUST MEN AND THEY
WILL BE TRUE TO YOU; TREAT THEM GREATLY
AND THEY WILL SHOW THEMSELVES GREAT.
—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Safety app for drivers debuts in flood-plagued Virginia city

This image provided by Kyle Spencer, acting chief resilience officer for the city of Norfolk, shows a flooded intersection along with a screenshot of the traffic app Waze depiction of the flood area in Norfolk, Va.

Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP)

The sun was shining when Kim Williams hopped in her Honda Odyssey to visit a friend at a nursing home. But an unexpected downpour on the drive back left her trapped in a maze of flooded streets.

Williams made turn after turn to avoid rising waters in a century-old neighborhood in Norfolk before shutting off her minivan.

"I knew that I would kill the car if I kept driving," Williams said of the storm from a few years ago. "I called the tow company and they said, 'We'll get to it when we can. We've got a very long list.'"

The increasing threat of sea-level rise on Virginia's coast means that an afternoon rainstorm can strand drivers for hours, delay parents from picking up children and damage cars beyond repair — all without a tropical storm on the radar. The city of Norfolk is trying to do something about that: Officials have partnered with the tech firm FloodMapp and the Waze traffic app to warn residents of flooded roadways in real time. The project is being launched at a time when

cities around the world are trying to adapt to climate change. And it's an example of how new technology will likely play an increasing role.

The pilot program in Norfolk went live this month after two years of development. FloodMapp CEO Juliette Murphy said the firm's modeling has proved to be "incredibly accurate" along the streets of this low-lying city on the Chesapeake Bay.

FloodMapp feeds data from rain forecasts, tide gauges and Norfolk's terrain into an algorithm. Drivers are warned on Waze

when at least 6 inches (15 centimeters) of water has likely pooled on a specific roadway. New flood information is updated every 15 minutes. Kyle Spencer, who is helping Norfolk adapt to sea-level rise as its acting chief resilience officer, said a single storm can strand hundreds of vehicles. The plan is for Waze to eventually reroute drivers when a road floods with 12 inches (30 centimeters) of water. The app's accuracy will improve, Spencer said, because drivers will validate Waze's warnings.

"It's kind of like a living thing," Spencer said. "The feedback loop can help make these models even better."

Norfolk, a city of nearly 250,000 people, is an ideal testing ground. It's more threatened than any other place on the Atlantic Coast by the combination of sinking land and rising seas, said Molly Mitchell, a Virginia Institute of Marine Science professor.

Water levels have risen by about 1.5 feet (.5 meters) since 1928. They're projected to rise by close to another 1.5 feet by 2050 — or more depending on the Earth's rising temperatures.

The Chesapeake Bay and the Elizabeth River form a crescent of water around three sides of the city, while other tributaries flow into its interior. During high tides, rains can overwhelm sewers and have nowhere to go but low-lying streets. Flooding affects truck traffic heading to and from port terminals. And it impedes the ability of U.S. Navy sailors to quickly reach the world's largest naval base, where piers are lined with aircraft carriers.

Marc Rabinowitz, a now-retired psychoanalyst, lost his Saab in a nor'easter several years ago. Floodwaters blocked his commute to work. He turned down a one-way street the wrong way because it looked clear.

"I got about halfway down, and water just starts filling up the car," he said. "The car clogs. It stops running. Luckily, a colleague who was walking to work starts pushing me off to the side." Drivers also face unpredictable "rain bombs," which can dump an inch of water in 30 minutes on an isolated area. Marc Vigeant, a project manager for a marine construction company, was caught in one in 2020 when he left work.

Water pooled around him. He searched Google Earth for higher elevation and quickly drove his Toyota Corolla to a nearby parking lot. □

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Fake poop helps evicted owls settle into new neighborhood

By CHRISTINA LARSON
AP Science Writer

Settling into a new home can be tough for anyone. So scientists have come up with some tricks to make transplanted burrowing owls feel like they are not alone in their new digs, playing owl sounds and scattering fake poop.

The owls' grassland homes are often prime real estate, and they've been losing ground to development in fast-growing regions like Silicon Valley and Southern California. Biologists have tried moving the owls to protected grasslands but the challenge has been getting the owls to accept their new homes.

Just dropping off the owls in prime habitat wasn't enough, prior attempts showed. In a pilot program, scientists took pains to create the impression that owls already lived there so they'd stick around. And it worked.

"They like to be in a neighborhood, to live near other owls," said Colleen Wisinski, a conservation biologist at the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, which launched the experiment with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The scientists played recordings of owl calls before and after the new arrivals were released at four locations in Southern California. Wisinski used a syringe to squirt around fake owl poop — in reality, white paint.

Their results were published



This photo provided by the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance shows a burrowing owl in a habitat at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park in 2014.

Thursday in the journal Animal Conservation.

Burrowing owls are the rare extroverts of the raptor world. These long-legged owls with slightly cross expressions actually love company. They nest in underground burrows with many owls nearby.

Such colonies provide protection from predators, such as coyotes or hawks, that may try to snack on the robin-sized, yellow-eyed birds. When one owl sounds an alarm, the others fly away. Federal law prohibits the killing of the birds but their habitat is not protected. Typically, they are flushed from their burrows before properties are built. "If after eviction there's nowhere for these guys to go, it's basically a death sen-

tence," said Lynne Trulio, an ecologist at San Jose State University who has studied burrowing owls for three decades. She was not part of the study.

The population of western burrowing owls — the subspecies that lives in California — has declined by one-third since 1965. It is considered a "species of special concern" in the state.

For their experiment, the scientists transplanted 47 burrowing owls during 2017-2018. Twenty were outfitted with GPS devices to track their movements, and the scientists also returned to the sites to check on them. Most successfully settled into their new homes and established breeding colonies. □

Associated Press

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Rogan responds to Spotify protest, COVID advisories

By JAKE COYLE

AP Film Writer

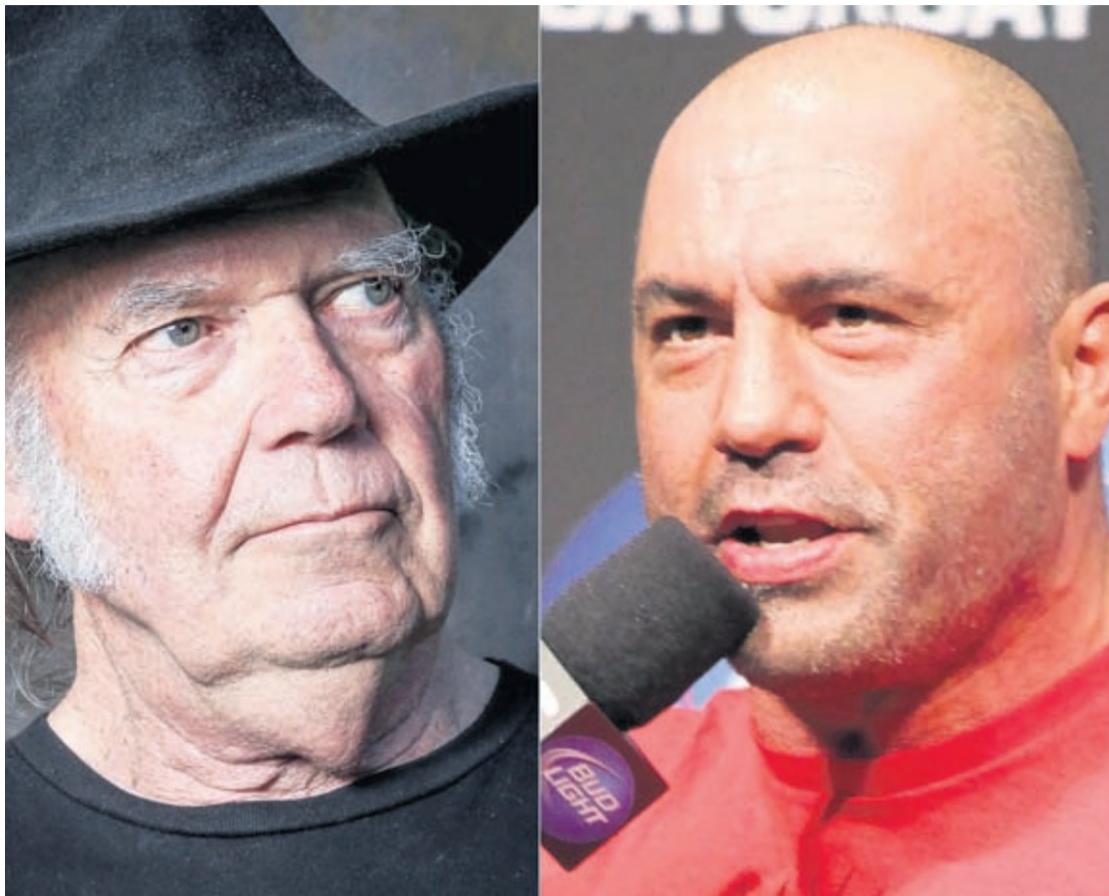
NEW YORK (AP)—Following protests of Spotify kicked off by Neil Young over the spread of COVID-19 vaccine misinformation, the music streaming service said that it will add content advisories before podcasts discussing the virus.

In a post Sunday, Spotify chief executive Daniel Ek laid out more transparent platform rules given the backlash stirred by Young, who on Wednesday had his music removed from Spotify after the tech giant declined to get rid of episodes of "The Joe Rogan Experience," which has been criticized for spreading virus misinformation.

"Personally, there are plenty of individuals and views on Spotify that I disagree with strongly," wrote Ek. "It is important to me that we don't take on the position of being content censor while also making sure that there are rules in place and consequences for those who violate them."

Ek said that the advisories will link to Spotify's fact-based COVID-19 hub in what he described as a "new effort to combat misinformation." It will roll out in the coming days, Ek said. He did not specifically reference Rogan or Young.

Rogan responded to the fallout on Sunday, saying in a video on Instagram that he was only seeking to



This combination photo shows Neil Young in Calabasas, Calif., on May 18, 2016, left, and UFC announcer and podcaster Joe Rogan before a UFC on FOX 5 event in Seattle, Dec. 7, 2012.

Associated Press

have conversations on his podcast with people who have "differing opinions."

"I'm not trying to promote misinformation, I'm not trying to be controversial," Rogan said. "I've never tried to do anything with this podcast other than to just talk to people."

He also said that he schedules the guests on his podcast himself, and that he would try to book doctors with different opinions right after he talks to "the controversial ones." Rogan noted

that he earlier sat down on the show with Dr. Sanjay Gupta, the chief medical correspondent for CNN, Dr. Michael Osterholm, who is a member of President Joe Biden's COVID-19 advisory board, and Dr. Peter Hotez from Baylor College of Medicine.

Rogan additionally welcomed the idea of adding advisories before podcasts related to COVID-19.

"Sure, have that on there. I'm very happy with that," he said.

Britain's Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, who have signed a multi-year deal to produce and host podcasts for Spotify under their production company Archewell Audio, on Sunday urged Spotify to tame virus misinformation.

"Last April, our co-founders began expressing concerns to our partners at Spotify about the all too real consequences of COVID-19 misinformation on its platform," an Archewell spokesperson said in a

statement. "We have continued to express our concerns to Spotify to ensure changes to its platform are made to help address this public health crisis. We look to Spotify to meet this moment and are committed to continuing our work together as it does."

Earlier Sunday, Nils Lofgren, the Bruce Springsteen guitarist and a member of Crazy Horse, a frequent collaborator with Young, said he was joining Young's Spotify revolt. Lofgren said he had already had the last 27 years of his music removed and requested labels with his earlier music to do likewise.

"We encourage all musicians, artists and music lovers everywhere to stand with us and cut ties with Spotify," wrote Lofgren in a statement.

On Friday, Joni Mitchell said she is seeking to remove all of her music from Spotify in solidarity with Young. Earlier, hundreds of scientists, professors and public health experts called on Spotify "to immediately establish a clear and public policy to moderate misinformation on its platform." Their criticism focused on a Dec. 31 episode from "The Joe Rogan Experience" in which Rogan featured Dr. Robert Malone, an infectious-disease specialist who has been banned from Twitter for spreading COVID-19. □

#MeToo protest in Amsterdam after allegations at TV show



Hundreds of people protested in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Saturday, Jan. 29, 2022, in a #MeToo demonstration sparked by allegations of sexual improprieties linked to a popular Dutch TV talent show.

Associated Press

AMSTERDAM (AP)—Hundreds of people protested Saturday in Amsterdam in a #MeToo demonstration sparked by allegations of sexual impropriety linked to a popular Dutch TV talent show.

The demonstration on Amsterdam's Museumplein square was organized following reports of sexual harassment, ranging from WhatsApp messages to an allegation of rape, linked to "The Voice of Holland." The popular show was taken off the air two weeks ago after women accused

two panelists who have appeared on the show in recent years and its pianist and band leader of inappropriate and unwanted sexual advances.

The two coaches, both popular Dutch performers, have denied wrongdoing. The bandleader apologized and resigned from the show.

While a number of women have made complaints to law enforcement authorities, prosecutors have not yet announced whether they will charge anybody. The scandal has led to

calls in the Netherlands for more action to make workplaces safer for women.

Labor union FNV said this week that "nearly five years after #MeToo, shockingly little has changed in tackling workplace sexual intimidation" and called on the government to tighten laws.

FNV vice president Kitty Jong said that the allegations about "The Voice Of Holland" clearly show "that women in vulnerable positions have too few resources to address sexual harassment." □

Olympic athletes have 1 more thing to stress about: Weather

By HOWARD FENDRICH and
PAT GRAHAM

AP Sports Writers

Mikaela Shiffrin describes herself as "super controlling over everything that's happening in my life," so the two-time Olympic gold medalist is not all that fond of one particular can't-do-a-thing-about-it aspect of her chosen sport, Alpine skiing.

"The weather," she said, "can literally change everything."

The 26-year-old from Colorado is scheduled to open her Beijing Olympics on Feb. 7 as the defending champion in the giant slalom. A key word there is "scheduled," because, as Shiffrin experienced at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, nothing is certain when it comes to the vagaries of various elements such as temperature, wind, sunlight or precipitation.

In outdoor events, all of those factors can, and quite often do, alter the competition and the competitors themselves.

"On a more macro level, it takes a lot of mental effort to be ready to go out and compete in an Olympic event and when ... it doesn't happen ... it's, for sure, stressful and takes energy away from that level. It's unlike any other sport, in that sense, right?"

"There's just not that many sports that are that affected, and that exposed, by weather, both to affect the outcome of a race and to affect the outcome of an event," said Mike Day, Shiffrin's main coach with the U.S. ski team. "It will have a big impact and has had a big impact in the past."

Olympians say the weather might change their preparation and mindset before a contest. Once the contest begins, it might harm—or, it's also true, help—their result. All of which turns this into just another source of stress at a one-day-every-four-years spectacle already filled with them.

"That's like, probably, 90% of what we're thinking about," said Keely Cashman, a 22-year-old Alpine skier from California head-



Mikaela Shiffrin, of the United States, skies into the finish area after winning the gold medal in the Women's Giant Slalom at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea, Feb. 15, 2018.

Associated Press

ing to her first Olympics. Snowfall is not in the forecast for the Yanqing mountain area during these Olympics. Strong wind is expected.

Something else to contend with: the way light, and therefore visibility, switches as the sun moves across the sky over the course of a day, creating shadows that appear and recede. In an event like the downhill, where speeds can top 80 mph (130 kph), it's vital to be able to pick up on nuances along the course.

"You need to see everything on the slope," said Vincent Kriechmayr, a 30-year-old from Austria who won two golds at the 2021 Alpine world championships. "When we have bad light, you have to react: 'What's coming (toward) my skis?' ... When we see the slope, we can push."

As it is, the quality of the snow tends to deteriorate as more racers head down

a hill. It generally is considered better to go earlier to avoid ruts and bumps that develop. But if a headwind gives way to a tailwind, say, or if a cloudy day turns clear and the crystals of the snow shift, then advantages can, too.

"It's rare to have days where it's consistent. You do have them, but they're few and far between," said U.S. ski team member Bryce Bennett, who won a World Cup downhill at Val Gardena, Italy, in December. "The variables make it interesting. When you're on the good side of variables, you're psyched. When you're on

the bad side, you're (angry)."

In action sports — think X Games — weather can almost singularly dictate the outcome.

A slate sky can dull the contrast between the background and the half-pipe for vaulting snowboarders, making it tough for riders to pick out landing spots. Wind can slow down athletes as they try to gain speed to execute tricks with 1440 degrees—or more—of spin. Shifting winds are most dangerous on the slopestyle course, where jumps are as high as 80 feet, because riders can't properly calibrate the

speed needed to execute tricks.

"I feel like you'd be crazy if you weren't worried about that kind of thing," said freestyle halfpipe skier Carly Margulies, a 24-year-old from California. "But at the end of the day, you kind of just have to push that out (of mind)."

That's a common sentiment.

"I'm not God, so I can't do anything about it. You have to (accept) the situation and just focus on yourself, focus on the skiing that you can do, focus on the technique and on the energy," said Alexis Pinturault, the reigning Alpine World Cup overall champion and a three-time Olympic medalist for France. "Of course it makes a difference — and we know it."

What sort of difference can the weather make on the clock in Alpine skiing?

As much as a second, Pinturault estimates.

That's significant. The margin between gold and silver was no more than 13 hundredths of a second in half of the 10 women's or men's races at the 2018 Games.

Four years ago, Shiffrin wanted to enter five individual events in South Korea.

Fierce winds led to postponements, prompting her to drop two races.

"You only have so many weather days built into the schedule," said Shiffrin, who once again plans to participate in slalom, giant slalom, downhill, super-G and Alpine combined. "At the end of the day, you can make every move right. You can be rested and ready to go strong. And it still can be totally messed up for, essentially, reasons that are completely out of your control. I don't really love that idea." □

Improbable run has Bengals saying "Why not us?"

By TIM DAHLBERG
AP Sports Columnist

Money Mac was going to deliver, just as Joe Burrow did a few moments earlier and the Bengals' defense did for the entire second half and more. They had come too far down this improbable road not to finish things off, even if history and the wrong end of a coin flip threatened to derail their best laid plans.

Evan McPherson — aka Money Mac — was as good with his game winner as a handful of \$100 bills, not to anyone's surprise. This was a kicker, you might remember, who told teammates last week that they were going to the AFC championship game even before he hit the winning field goal to beat Tennessee.

What was surprising was Patrick Mahomes made a big mistake in a game the Kansas City Chiefs were about to put away as the final seconds ran out in the first half. Even more surprising was the way an unheralded Cincinnati defense suddenly rose up to put the clamps on the high-powered Chiefs, then made a play in overtime that made the lost coin flip moot.

Who Dey? Not too many people outside Cincinnati knew just a few weeks ago. They do now. The Bengals are Super Bowl bound for the first time since Ickey Woods was dancing the shuffle more than three long decades ago.

And here's a tip for those betting the game at home:



Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow (9) holds the Lamar Hunt trophy after an AFC championship NFL football game against the Kansas City Chiefs, Sunday, Jan. 30, 2022, in Kansas City, Mo.

Associated Press

They're not content just to be there.

"We were made for this moment," said safety Vonn Bell, whose interception of a tipped pass led to the winning field goal. "Why not us?"

That question would have been laughable two years ago when the Bengals were the worst team in the NFL. There weren't a lot of believers when the playoffs began three weeks ago, either, even as Burrow warned that his team should be taken more seriously.

They'll be underdogs for a third straight game in the Super Bowl, too, with the Rams a 3 1/2-point pick at home in Los Angeles.

Fade them at your own risk, though, or you might end up like the bettor who put \$200,000 on the Chiefs at Caesars Sportsbook when they were up 21-3, certain that the paltry 10 grand they would have made was free money indeed. "It's a special team capable of doing special things," Bengals coach Zac Taylor said. "We're not surprised, it's where we were meant to be."

The way the Chiefs played early Sunday, the only place the Bengals seemed destined for was a plane ride home.

Down 21-10 with Kansas City just a few yards from yet another score, they could have taken their

beating and looked for a warm place to relax during the offseason.

But a funny thing happened. The Chiefs failed to score the touchdown just before halftime that might have put the game out of reach. Mahomes compounded the error with an ill-advised toss that cost them a field goal, too, when time ran out at the half.

From then on, the Chiefs looked tight. They seemed tentative. Mahomes, who could do no wrong early, suddenly couldn't do anything right.

And Burrow, the No. 1 draft pick who grew up only a few hours outside Cincinnati, made the Chiefs pay

for every mistake they made.

"We've been a second half team all year," Burrow said. "We didn't want to be that way but that's kind of how it worked out."

That's probably not the best game plan for a Super Bowl, but these Bengals seem to believe, all the way from the top on down. Taylor talked afterward how he expected his tired defense to come up with a big play to begin overtime — and it did. He talked about Burrow always seeming to find some way to gain yards when needed most, something he did from the second quarter on.

And he talked about what it meant to a city that never gets a mention when the conversation turns to the NFL elite.

"You can't help but think about all the people back in Cincinnati celebrating right now," Taylor said. "I'm so happy for the city of Cincinnati. They've waited for this moment."

They got what they were waiting for, 33 years after losing to San Francisco in the Super Bowl. The Bengals delivered to a man, and their rookie kicker finished off the 27-24 win with his 12th field goal in 12 post-season attempts, an NFL record.

Afterward, Burrow flashed the smile of a victor and even got a few laughs when asked whether the glittering large pendant around his neck contained real diamonds. □



Jackie Robinson, infielder for the Brooklyn Dodgers, swings his bat in this action pose at Ebbett's Field in Brooklyn, N.Y., on May 9, 1951.

Associated Press

Vandalized plaque honoring Jackie Robinson to be displayed

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A plaque honoring baseball legend Jackie Robinson that was vandalized in Georgia is coming to Kansas City's Negro Leagues Baseball Museum to be put on display.

The sign was erected in 2001 outside the birthplace of Robinson near Cairo, Georgia. Community members there discovered last year that some-

one had shot the plaque multiple times.

Curator and museum vice president Ray Doswell told the Kansas City Star that displaying the defaced marker is an opportunity to teach the public about Robinson's story and combat hate.

Robinson broke Major League Baseball's color barrier in 1947 when he became the league's first

Black player.

Robinson's hometown replaced the damaged marker, with help from the league, and added another marker at a library last week.

The vandalized marker is slated to go on display around mid-April, after a display case is built and spot secured in the museum, to coincide with the museum's celebration

of the 75th anniversary of Robinson's debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers. The plaque is expected to be permanently loaned to the Kansas City museum for regular display.

Museum community engagement manager Kiona Sinks said in a tweet that the vandalized marker will "serve as a reminder that the ugliness of America's past persists to this day." □